The following claims are presented for examination:

1. (Currently Amended) A method comprising:

receiving a proposed password from a user;

performing **, by a search engine tool,** an Internet search ~~using a query containing one or more keywords~~ **based on a keyword that is** derived from the proposed password ~~by using a search engine tool~~ ; and

rejecting the proposed password when more than one **[[web]] Web** page retrieved by the search engine tool ~~contain~~ **contains** both **:**

(i)   the proposed password and

(ii)   ~~another~~ **a** string that is ~~determined~~ based on a rule for the selection of passwords.

2. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1, **wherein:**

the proposed password comprises a telephone number;

the search query comprises (i) a user name that is associated with the proposed password and (ii) the proposed password; and

the string is an identifier of a person.

~~wherein the rule evaluates whether the proposed password can be qualitatively correlated with the user.~~

3. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the rule evaluates whether the proposed password can be quantitatively correlated with the user.

4. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the proposed password is comprised of a proposed answer and a proposed hint and wherein the rule evaluates whether the proposed answer can be correlated with the proposed hint in a particular relation.

5. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 4, wherein the rule concerns a relation from the group consisting essentially of: self, family member, co-author, teammate, colleague, neighbor, community member or household member.

6. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the proposed password is comprised of a proposed answer and a proposed hint and wherein the rule evaluates whether the proposed answer can be obtained from the proposed hint.

7. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the proposed password is an identifying number.

8. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 7, wherein the rule evaluates whether the identifying number identifies a person in a particular relationship to the user.

9. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 7, wherein the rule evaluates whether the identifying number is a top N most commonly used identifying number.

10. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 7, wherein the rule evaluates whether the identifying number identifies a top N commercial entity.

11. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 7, wherein the rule evaluates whether the identifying number identities the user.

12. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 7, wherein the identifying number is a portion of a telephone number.

13. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 7, wherein the identifying number is a portion of an address.

14. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 7, wherein the identifying number is a portion of social security number.

15. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the proposed password is a word.

16. (Currently Amended) The method of claim **1 wherein the search engine tool retrieves a plurality of web pages.** ~~15, wherein the rule evaluates a correlation between the word and the user~~.

17. (Currently Amended) The method of claim **16** [[1]], **wherein the proposed password is rejected based on a count of Web pages from the plurality that contain both the proposed password and the string** ~~wherein the search engine is a meta search engine~~.

18. (Canceled)

19. (Currently Amended) The method of claim [[1]] **17**, wherein the **proposed password is rejected when the count exceeds a threshold that is greater than one.** ~~search engine employs local proximity techniques.~~

20. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the search engine employs a number classification, wherein the number classification identifies usage of one or more numbers found in a web page.

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21. (Currently Amended) An apparatus comprising:

a memory; and

at least one processor, coupled to the memory, operative to:

receive a proposed password from a user;

perform**, by a search engine tool,** an Internet search ~~using a query containing~~ **based on** one or more keywords derived from the proposed password~~, by using a search engine tool~~; and

reject the proposed password based on the number of web pages retrieved by the search engine tool that contain both**:**

(i) the proposed password and

(ii) ~~another~~ **a** string that is ~~determined~~ based on a rule for the selection of passwords**[[,]]**;

wherein the proposed password is rejected when the number of web pages retrieved by the search engine tool, that contain both the proposed password and the ~~other~~ string, exceeds a threshold**[[,]]**; and

wherein the threshold is greater than one.

22. (Currently Amended) The apparatus of claim 21, **wherein:**

the proposed password comprises a telephone number;

the search query comprises (i) a user name that is associated with the proposed password and (ii) the proposed password; and

the string is an identifier of a person.

~~wherein the rule evaluates whether the proposed password can be correlated with the user.~~

23. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 21, wherein the proposed password is comprised of a proposed answer and a proposed hint and wherein rule evaluates whether the proposed answer can be correlated with the proposed hint in a particular relation.

24. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 21, wherein the proposed password is comprised of a proposed answer and a proposed hint and wherein the rule evaluates whether the proposed answer can be obtained from the proposed hint.

25. (Currently Amended) The apparatus of claim **[[21]] 22 wherein the search engine tool retrieves a plurality of Web pages.**

26. (Currently Amended) The apparatus of claim **25 wherein the proposed password is rejected based on a count of Web pages from the plurality that contain both the proposed password and the string.** ~~25, wherein the rule evaluates whether the identifying number identifies a person in a particular relationship to the user.~~

27. (Previously Presented) An article of manufacture for evaluating a password proposed by a user, comprising a machine readable medium containing one or more programs which when executed implement the steps of:

receive the proposed password from the user; and

performing an Internet search using a query containing one or more keywords derived from the proposed password,-by using a search engine tool; and

rejecting the proposed password based on the number of web pages retrieved by the search engine tool that contain both a the proposed password and another string that is determined based on a rule for the selection of passwords, wherein the proposed password is rejected when the number of web pages retrieved by the search engine tool, that contain both the proposed password and the other string, exceeds a threshold, and wherein the threshold is greater than one.